DREAMS AND VISIONS
Joel 2;28-32, Acts 2:1-4
June 3, 1979
Pentecost - Communion Meditation

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"Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." So observed one of Israel's prophets - Joel - 2,300 years ago. It's true of course. Young people do have visions. The young are idealistic, full of high, noble and unfocused hope, unfettered by the adult realities of pragmatism, expedience, the market economy and the frailty of the middle age ego, the young wonder why people can't be fair to one another, or why nations can't stop fighting, or why we can't build fewer nuclear weapons next year and concentrate on feeding hungry people instead. It is no coincidence that most of the major social changes in the world have been preceded by the agitation, pressure, demonstration and by young people on college and university campuses several years ago. And they are at it again: back in Washington with their idealistic dreams and simple questions about the fact that we'll soon be knee deep in nuclear waste material which will remain lethal to human life several thousand years longer than the containers in which it is stored will last.

To be young is to have a vision of what ought to be - what could be

The young dream dreams and when the late President Kennedy told us not to ask what the nation could do for us, but what we could do for the nation, the young knew what he was talking about. It was an optimistic vision about peace and freedom, and its brain child was one of the most idealistic projects any nation ever attempted - The Peace Corps. When the tally of the 1960's is finally counted, that, I think, will be the most tragic loss of all. Idealism and the

hopeful visions

~~dreams~~ of the young were ruthlessly crushed somewhere between Saigon and the Watergate Hearings - and have not been seen or heard from since. There is something sad and unhealthy about a culture whose young people have forgotten how to ham

~~dream dreams~~ a vision; ~~the Bible uses a metaphor to describe it - something about a birthright exchanged for a mess of pottage.~~

dreaming dreams;

insert 2a

And the elderly ~~seeing visions~~: that's true, too, I keep discovering. Some of the most hopeful, most visionary and most courageous folk I am privileged to know are well beyond retirement age. I think immediately of Maggie Kuhn, totally fearless, totally committed to peace, justice, and totally optimistic about the possibilities for the future. The elderly, it appears, do not ordinarily give up on the human condition. In fact, quite the opposite seems to be the case: a renewal of hopefulness and an open ended optimism.

I wonder if the prophet Joel's concentration on youth and old age, and his neglect of the inbetween years is accidental. We regard the time between 25 and 65 as the shank of life. Compared to gearing up and gearing down, the important things all happen in the middle - or so we seem to think. And I wonder if Joel's excluding middle age from the "dreaming - visioning" phenomena is purely coincidental. I have decided that it is not. I'm of the opinion that he knew about the eternal reality of the human condition here, as well.

The fact is that middle aged people don't do as much dreaming as their brothers and sisters at either end of the spectrum. The fact is that middle age people are too busy managing the world to dream much about the future. Middle

Carl Sandburg, Pablo Casals, Grandma Moses, Winston Churchill, Frank Lloyd Wright - each made his or her major contribution to society after the age of 65.

Research of 400 famous persons revealed that of the greatest achievements

35% between 60 + 70

23% .. 70 + 80

8% after 80

66% of world's greatest work done by people over 60!

years mean earning a living and raising children, and providing for their education, and by force of will making the gears of industry turn and the business of the world proceed. It is not a time for idealism. Realism is the important word: ~~dreamers don't survive long in our busy world~~. In middle years we are so realistic that cynicism begins to invade the corners of life; and then pessimism and whatever dreams and visions we may have had about a better world and a fuller life are traded in for survival and a paid-up mortgage and monthly dividends.

Our concern here is that hope for the future, the dreams of young people and the visions of old people, ~~are primary religious experiences~~ is one of the major concern of religion. The philosophers and psychologists understand that. Marxist theoretician Ernst Bloch writes: "Where there is hope, there is religion." And Erich Fromm, "hope is an intrinsic element of the structure of life of ~~the dynamic of (the human) spirit.~~" Theologian Hans Schwarz put it simply, "Hope is as necessary for human life as oxygen." (see Ted Peters, Futures Human and Divine, p. 84)

From the beginning the Christian faith has been very hopeful about the future; realistic about the human condition - in fact, so realistic that some find our theologies of sin depressing, yet fundamentally and essentially hopeful, optimistic. Christians have been the most notorious dreamers in history. Christians have been at the very center of that procession, from one generation to the next, that believes that life can be better in the future than

it is in the present. The Christian Church has been the most hopelessly hopeful grouping of human beings in all of history.

And the reason is Pentecost. One day long ago, a group of Jesus' friends experienced the power and presence of God in the world in a very real way. And the church has known from that time on, that because God is in the picture some very good and interesting possibilities will be found in the future.

Let's look for a moment at the texts - the Biblical sources for the ideas we've been considering.

The prophet Joel did his writing between 400 and 343 B.C. The community of Jews who had been in Babylonian exile had returned, resettled and had been living in Jerusalem for several generations. They had created the life style which would become the religion of Judaism. But things were not looking good, in spite of their faithfulness. A severe drought and a plague of locusts had just wiped out the entire crop and a nation to the north was consolidating troops near the border. The realists among them surely were ringing their hands.

Joel wrote about a renewal of personal religion, deeper than the mere practice of the temple rituals. And then he held up his vision of the day when God's spirit - literally, his breath, would be poured out on all the people. People would know the reality of God. His reign would be experienced and felt by all people. Part of it would be the dreaming of young people and the visions of the elderly. In

addition the prophet drew on some very vivid symbols out of the past, fire and smoke and blood to express the power and mystery of God's presence.

Now - proved 400 years - disciples in Jerusalem on Pentecost - harvest festival

The scholars think that text from Joel was, in all probability, the text read on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, some 400 years later; ~~when the disciples of Jesus were still trying to assimilate everything that had occurred to them.~~

Still early

Something happened to those people. We have an unfortunate tendency to concentrate on the highly symbolic language with which someone tried later to describe what it was like - It was Something very powerful: something very real and confirming and supporting and literally inspiring which means enfused with spirit or breath of God if you will. They knew that God in fact, was real: that his reign was in force: that he was actively present in the world. They understood something new and they understood what they had to do next - namely tell other people about it.

in Jesus X

British Theologian Leslie Newbegin explains it beautifully. "The apostles did not say 'Let's get going: now we must preach the Gospel'. Not a hint of that! What happened was an explosion of love and joy and hope. The miracle of God's kingdom had broken in and someone had to explain it." (lecture to UPCUSA, G.A. Kansas City, 5/22/79)

That's what Pentecost is about - an explosion of love - joy - hope, so real that the ones who first experienced it could only explain it in terms of the spirit of God: the

breath, life - the vital essence of God himself filling the life of the world.

Very simply - it is the ground of our hope. It is the ground of the only hope I can see, frankly. It is reason to celebrate the dreams and visions of young and old: and in middle years to pull back from the draining realism of our self-imposed business to see a better future for our children and their children after them.

Where? Where in the world do you see anything to support such an unrealistic optimism -

I confess that I see it here: in the fellowship of this congregation. I can't explain it any more precisely than the man who chose images of wind and fire, but there are experiences of corporate worship here that bear the reality of God for me.

Or Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, where volunteers from all over the world converge to work quietly for peace and reconciliation: to engage in hope that the world can be better, that love is better than hate. There is no reason for that apart from the very spirit of God himself.

Or here again, as thirteen young people with dreams of their own and optimism as yet unsullied by adult pragmatism, dare to stand up and call Jesus Christ their Lord and promise to follow him.

Can you think, all things considered, of anything more hopeful than that; any better promise for the world; any

Pentecost drama more full of God's spirit?

The bread we eat and the cup we drink today - are reminders of our Lord's death; but this day, may they be ~~they are~~ reminders more of his presence - in the world - and his promise that we will not be alone, ever again; that the future - for all of us together and each of us personally - will be full of ~~love.~~ him: that he will continue to give us the gift of his Spirit: and that our young people may dream their hopeful dreams - and ~~our~~ older people have their visions: - that those of us in the middle and the vision dream -

O God, breathe on us. Breathe into our lives your spirit of love and joy and hope. Deliver us from the routine staleness of our lives. Enlarge our expectations. Give us courage to hope and to work for a better world. Grant us to know, as the apostles knew long ago, the reality of your presence. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

that all of us may live into the future with hope + conf. L...

A—

9:00

~~Creed~~

~~Invitation~~